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TAGS: PREL PHUM PINR IV CT TO CD FR

SUBJECT: NUDGING DEBY ON DIALOGUE. MFA REMARKS ON CHAD,
C.A.R., TOGO, AND COTE D'IVOIRE

REF: A. NDJAMENA 828 B. D'ELIA-AF/W E-MAILS

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Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Josiah B. Rosenblatt. Reas
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¶1. (C) Summary: French Minister of Cooperation Girardin will deliver a clear message to President Deby in Chad this week on the necessity for national dialogue, according to MFA AF DAS-Equivalent Foucher. The unusual presence of French Presidential Africa Adviser Bonnecorse on Girardin's trip constitutes a direct message from President Chirac that Deby must launch a process of national dialogue built around 2007 legislative elections, drawing on assistance from the European Union. Foucher regretted diplomatic missteps by EU Commissioner for Development Michel that had incited Deby's public repudiation of "foreign" interference. Foucher argued that French support for Deby was far from unequivocal and that there had been an animated debate within the GOF during the April rebel offensive on the limits of French support. Foucher described mounting MFA worries about backsliding in the Central African Republic (C.A.R.) and the dramatic surge in Chinese involvement, with PRC bilateral assistance now surpassing aid from Paris. Turning to Togo, Foucher branded Paris-based opposition leader an obstacle to national dialogue. Regarding French policy-making on Cote d'Ivoire, Foucher underscored the marginalization of Nathalie de La Palme, an MFA adviser who had been the principal architect of the 2003 Linas-Marcoussis Accord. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Chad, Ivory Coast and the Central African Republic currently comprise the main preoccupations for MFA AF DAS-Equivalent Bruno Foucher, he stated in a June 12 meeting with Africa Watcher. Foucher, whose area of responsibility covers West and Central Africa, including Chad but not DRC or Congo/Brazzaville, remarked that the MFA Africa bureau has supported 54 ministerial-level visits to African countries since January, most in his bailiwick. Both Foucher and Presidential Africa Adviser Michel de Bonnecorse will accompany the Minister for Cooperation for June 15 meetings in Chad aimed at driving national dialogue.

Chad: Deby Must Engage; EU Must lead

¶13. (C) Minister for Cooperation Brigitte Girardin will meet with Chadian President Deby circa June 15 to drive home to President Deby the need for outreach and dialogue with the non-violent national dialogue. The presence of Presidential Africa Advisor Bonnecorse is highly unusual and a clear signal to Deby that Girardin is carrying a direct message from Chirac on the necessity of engagement, Foucher added. All the same, France does not wish to be out front in pushing reform and relies on the EU to take the lead, Foucher said, noting French support for the recent EU Troika initiative. The EU had the finances and the know-how to underwrite a series of governance seminars on a regular basis, setting the 2007 legislative elections as the goal-posts. However, Foucher volunteered that EU Commissioner for Development Louis Michel was rather a loose cannon. Michel had provoked Deby by an overly direct, impolitic and patronizing follow-up letter to the earlier EU Troika call for dialogue; hence, Deby's blast against "foreign" or international involvement in the process (Ref A).

French Support for Deby not Unequivocal

¶14. (C/NF) Foucher insisted that French policy on Chad, specifically French support for Deby, was less clear-cut than might appear. In the heat of the April FUCD offensive, Bonnecorse had convoked what Foucher described as a very gripping emergency meeting at which it was not self-evident, he maintained, whether France would stand by Deby. The argument that Deby had no proper successor won the day -- and continues to do so -- and that same meeting saw the explicit decision taken, Foucher revealed, for French forces to fire the famous warning shot on April 12 against an advancing rebel column. Told that French intelligence and logistical support had clearly proved decisive in Deby's repulsing the FUCD offensive, Foucher countered that Deby, in the end, had

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insisted on going it alone, refusing a French offer of airlift and instead force-marching troops from the east overnight into N'djamena for the showdown in the city. Asked if Deby had sought to deliver the coup de grace without French help for symbolic reasons, Foucher demurred, admitting he believed Deby opted for the overland route because the airlift lacked the capacity to transport certain heavy weaponry and munitions he needed.

Central African Republic: Beijing Eclipsing Paris?

¶15. (C) After emerging from turbulence to hold a proper election, the Central African Republic (C.A.R.) is rapidly backsliding, worrying the French MFA and Presidency. A/S-Equivalent for African Affairs Bruno Joubert initiated an interagency task force on June 9, including MOD, Finance, Development, and MFA. Although there has been some easing in the availability of multilateral assistance thanks to an agreement with the IMF and headway with the World Bank, there has been no commensurate growth in bilateral assistance -- with a key exception. France is troubled at the degree of Chinese encroachment, Foucher said, noting, with astonishment, that Chinese aid to C.A.R. in 2005 had surpassed that of France.

Togo: Gilchrist Olympio Impedes Dialogue

¶16. (C/NF) Africa Watcher noted that he had again been approached by self-imposed Togolese exile and principal opposition leader Gilchrist Olympio, who was now looking for international help in unblocking the naming of a UN mediator (Ref B). Foucher branded Olympio himself as the chief obstacle. Regarding the claim, advanced by Olympio's own lieutenants, that the veteran Olympio is all that is holding back a radicalization of the Togolese opposition, Foucher

responded that was hogwash. Told that Olympio claimed to talk regularly by telephone with EC Commissioner for Development Louis Michel and with Kofi Annan, whom he knew from Ghana, Foucher remarked that Michel (whom Foucher had earlier criticized for his tactless diplomacy) had told the MFA he found Olympio despicable. Should Olympio travel to Washington, as he has proposed, Foucher predicted he would exploit any encounter with U.S. officials; a meeting on UN premises in New York, however, struck him as less problematic. Foucher admitted he had never met Olympio personally, noting his marginalization by the MFA and French Presidency was a policy decision.

Cote d'Ivoire and the Downfall of a French Africanist

¶17. (C/NF) Africa Watcher queried Foucher on the role of Nathalie de La Palme, the chief adviser on Africa to Villepin during his tenure as Foreign Minister, and the architect of the 2003 Linas-Marcoussis Accord. Though still attached to the MFA, de La Palme was now definitively a non-player, Foucher replied. Bonnecorse had sidelined her, and Presidential Chirac had personally relieved her of her role on Cote d'Ivoire, in particular, when it became evident she had grown too comfortable with President Gbagbo and his coterie. The last straw came when de La Palme nonetheless tried to organize a separate trip to Abidjan to coincide with a meeting of the International Working Group. La Palme had denied charges of seeking to lead parallel bilateral discussions, but the MFA found out the French embassy in Abidjan had in fact been tasked by her to organize a program of high-level meetings. Regarding Minister for Cooperation Brigitte Girardin, Foucher was lavish in his praise, describing her as a real policy player on Africa, squarely in the driver's seat on Cote d'Ivoire, and a confidante of the French Presidency.

Comment: A Straight-Shooter who works well with the U.S.

¶18. (C/NF) Comment and Biographical Note: Foucher is pragmatic and frank, a straightshooter and valued embassy

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contact. Recruited personally by Joubert despite no diplomatic service in Africa, Foucher is far from the traditional French Africanist, though he oversees the largest and for Paris the most challenging division within the MFA Africa Bureau. His career includes postings in Teheran and Riyadh, in addition to IO-related service and a four-year stint with the French delegation to the United Nations in New York. He also claims to have been a liaison to tribal groups key to 2001 Northern Alliance forces in Afghanistan, once remarking that, had he not linked himself through Joubert to Africa, he would have coveted an ambassadorship in Kabul. The 45-year old Foucher is now on the shortlist for a number of key embassies in Africa, including N'djamena (protect), subject to a decision this summer by the Prime Minister. Evidently, Foucher works well with others, certainly with Joubert and Bonnecorse. He respects Bonnecorse, whom he claims deserves credit for his quiet efforts at undoing the worst traditions of "la Francafrique," an era that Foucher claims is definitively at an end.

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